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American priest is kidnapped on way to work in West Beirut

By Donald Neff
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In yet another act against Americans, a U.S. Roman Catholic priest was kidnapped yesterday in predominantly Moslem West Beirut — the eighth American abducted in the past 11 months in that violent city.

The abductors, in two cars and carrying rifles, intercepted the Rev. Lawrence Martin Jenco's chauffeur-driven Pontiac as he headed to work in West Beirut from his home near the American University of Beirut at about 7:30 a.m.

Father Jenco's Moslem driver, Khaled Krunfol, told police he tried to resist but was beaten with a pistol butt and stuffed in the trunk of the car while the priest was taken away in another vehicle.

No demands have been made for his release, or for the four other Americans still being held hostage, some of them as long as 10 months.

"They don't want money," said a State Department source. "This, like the others, is probably a political action. They want to publicize their opposition to U.S. policies in the region and embarrass America."

There was also speculation that the kidnappers may be trying to exert pres-

sure on Kuwait to release 17 people imprisoned for bombing the U.S. and French embassies there in late 1983.

The kidnapping came less than 12 hours after the Moslem Amal militia headed by Nabih Berri rescued a Swiss diplomat, Eric Wehrli, 45, who had been abducted Thursday by relatives of a man being held by Swiss authorities as a suspected terrorist. Mr. Berri said the kidnappers had hoped to barter the suspect's release.

A worker at the Catholic Relief Service in Beirut, which Father Jenco has headed since moving to Lebanon last October, said the priest, a member of the Servite order from Joliet, Ill., is 50-years-old.

His physician reported yesterday that an examination Monday showed Father Jenco suffers from a heart ailment.

State-run Beirut Radio said U.S. Ambassador Reginald Bartholomew and Papal Nuncio Luciano Angeloni called Mr. Berri and requested his help in finding Father Jenco. Mr. Berri's Amal is the dominant Shi'ite militia and, with the Druze militia, holds sway in west Beirut.

"Condemning abductions is no longer enough," the radio quoted Mr. Berri as saying after the telephoned pleas. "Yesterday we worked all night to release the

Swiss, and today we were surprised by the kidnapping of the American priest."

Kidnapping has become practically a way of life — and death — since Lebanon's civil war broke out nine years ago.

Some 2,000 Lebanese have been abducted during that period and are still missing, prompting repeated demonstrations by their relatives demanding to know whether the victims are still alive.

The latest demonstration came Monday, when scores of protesters, many of them women, blocked roads and burned tires for six hours, demanding that the various militias account for the kidnappings.

Of the eight Americans kidnapped since Moslems took control of west Beirut last February, the four still being held in addition to Father Jenco are: Jeremy Levin, 52, Middle East bureau chief for Cable News Network, taken March 7; William Buckley, 55, political officer at the U.S. Embassy, kidnapped March 16; the Rev. Benjamin M. Weir, 60, a Presbyterian minister who had served for the past 21 years in Beirut, May 8; and Peter Kilburn, 61, librarian at the American University of Beirut, Dec. 4.

Three others were abducted but later released unharmed. Dr. Frank Regier, 52,

dean of the electrical engineering department at the American University, was seized Feb. 10 and freed April 15, 1984. United Press International's Beirut bureau chief, Steve Hagey, and ABC News correspondent Margaret Fox were abducted Dec. 29 and released several hours later.



Rev. Lawrence Jenco

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